Home Life on Early Ranches of Southwest Texas

CHAPTER XI

John Leakey
Real County

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JOHN LEAKEY and his wife, Nancy Patterson Leakey, had been married about five years when they moved from Henderson county, to Uvalde county in 1854. This move was probably the result of Mrs. Leakey having malaria. They came with Mrs. Leakey's parents, Mr. and Mrs. George W. Patterson, and a number of other families. The Leakeys settled on the Sabinal River about seven miles from the present town of Sabinal.

Mr. Leakey had been a brick mason and a ranchman in East Texas. He did not like the new country and considered returning to East Texas, but his father-in-law persuaded him to go into the Frio Canyon and put up a saw mill. Mr. Leakey brought his family and household goods in ox-drawn wagons over rough, rocky roads through the clear cypress waters of the Sabinal, over beautifully wooded mountains, to a lovely grove on the banks of the Frio near the present site of the town of Leakey. He became one of the most noted characters among the pioneers of that section, and vowed he would live there in spite of the Indians. He had many encounters with them and at times it seemed as if he would be unable to sustain himself and protect his family. His was the first home in the canyon and it was raided twice by the Indians before he could complete it. Mr. Leakey and his family lived in camps until the first house could be built. The cypress timber being the main attraction for Mr. Leakey, the camps were moved frequently in order to be conveniently near the timber.

Finally the first house was built of hand-hewn cypress slabs. It contained two rooms. While Mr. Leakey and the other men were busy making cypress shingles by hand, Mrs. Leakey set about making a home. She had been reared in East Texas during the slave days, but she had been taught to work, although she had never assumed much responsibility. Neither she nor Mr. Leakey wanted slaves, so she did all of her work with the little equipment. She baked outdoors over an open fire; her cooking utensils included a coffee pot, frying pan, iron pot for boiling and a "Dutch Oven," sometimes called a "skillet and lid." This skillet was made with short legs to set over a smoldering fire, and a close-fitted lid with a rim to hold hot ashes and coals, so that the food could bake evenly on the top and bottom.

There was plenty of food available. The land was "flowing with milk and honey." Yet, the cows had to be milked and the honey must be gathered from the "bee trees." The black bear, deer and turkey had to be hunted and killed, and the fish caught from the river. Beans, peas, squash, and corn were raised in the garden. The men did the hunting and fishing, although Mrs. Leakey could use her gun if necessary. She did the family washing in the river. The ironing was done with heavy sad irons which were heated on an outdoor fire. Water for household purposes was carried up the hill from a spring.

Mrs. Leaky spun and wove the materials to make clothes for the entire family. She carded bats by hand for both the woolen and cotton material and spun the thread at home. She had to go to her mother's, eighteen miles away, to weave on the loom. She also dyed the materials, using agaritta root for yellow and walnut leaves for brown. The colors were set with alum. She and her mother usually spun and wove together and made beautiful bedspreads. The cotton was raised by Mrs. Leakey's father. She knitted the stockings for her family in the early days.

Indians a Constant Threat.

Mrs. Leakey enjoyed her work, although she kept a constant watch for any sign of the approach of the Indians. Mack, the oldest son, began riding with his father when he was five years old. One day his father told him to ride through a thicket while he went around it. Mack got hung on a grape vine and yelled to his father. Naturally, Mr. Leakey thought the Indians were after him. But scares did not always turn out so satisfactorily. Indians did get after Tom, the second son. He frequently scared the Mexican help by yelling "Indians." One day when he went across the river after his pony, some Indians started after him. By jumping off a high bluff into the river he managed to escape. His favorite sister heard him screaming and ran and told her mother.

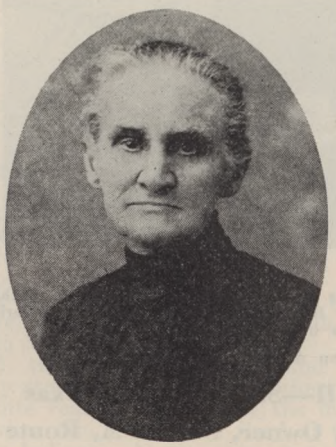
"Oh, he is just scaring the Mexicans," said Mrs. Leakey. But about that time he fell on the porch, crying, "Mother, you would not have cared if the Indians had gotten me!" They had stolen his pony; however, it was recovered later.

Mr. Leakey never left Mrs. Leakey entirely alone. Frequently, a young boy in his teens stayed with her. One time she saw the Indians come into the yard and take the horses. When she reached for her gun, an Indian started toward the house. She called to the boy who was staying with her and the Indian, thinking it was her husband, ran away.

She knew that always she must be ready to go quickly to her father's home, when warned that the Indians were approaching. One of the sure signs of their approach was when an old mule would come running home excitedly with her head up. Finally she was shot to death by the Indians with arrows. The settlers usually managed to let each other know of any sign of the approaching Indians; however, sometimes the Indians surprised them. Mr. Leakey frequently took his family in an ox-drawn wagon to Mrs. Leakey's parents who lived in the Patterson settlement. They went as the larger settlement gave better protection from the Indians and the country was more open so the Indians could not hide so easily. The Indians seldom killed anyone during their raids, but plundered and destroyed property. Frequently when people returned to their homes the feather beds were found ripped open with clouds of feathers meeting them as they opened the door.

"Nancy, we will have to go to San Antonio to get some ticking for more feather beds," was Mr. Leakey's favorite expression when they returned home and found such a catastrophe.

On one occasion a Mr. Basham and a Mr. Aldridge, neighbors of the Leakey family, were camped on the river making shingles. Mr. Aldredge had borrowed Mr. Leakey's gun to kill a deer. He killed one on the spot where the town of Leakey is now and was nearly ready to skin it when he detected an Indian behind a tree watching him. Not knowing how many more might be near, he beat a hasty retreat. A man by the name of Carter went back with him and brought the deer in. But, very soon signal smokes were seen on the mountains. All of the men except Mr. Leakey went out to look for the Indians. He remained at home to protect the women and the children. The Indians were followed three miles up the river. Some of them were killed and this stopped the raiding for a while.



NANCY PATTERSON LEAKEY

JOHN LEAKEY

On one occasion the Leakey family went on a visit to Sabinal Canyon and spent the night at the home of Aaron Anglin. During the night, the barking of the dogs and the peculiar actions of one dog that always tried to get into the house and under the bed when the Indians were near aroused the fears of an old negro woman. She was sleeping in a small room in the back of the yard. Slipping into the house she quietly and quickly aroused the household. The house was kept in darkness while Mr. Leakey took his pistol and stepped out into the yard. He was greeted with a shower of arrows. Three Indians were concealed in the shadows of some trees and were so far away that the arrows struck the ground at his feet, doing no damage. When Mr. Leakey began firing in their direction, they ran. He pursued them until he had used all his leads. He then returned home and stood guard in the darkness for the remainder of the night. When daylight came, he examined the ground and found the trail of three Indians, two of whom he knew were wounded. A further search convinced him that they were more than three in number. After notifying the settlers, Gid Thompson, Sebe Barrymore, Silas Webster, Henry Robinson, and Mr. Leakey started in pursuit. They did not expect to find them very soon, unless they should find the two whom Mr. Leakey had wounded.

Off to Battle Indians.

The posse took time to get ready, Mrs. Anglin, assisted by Mrs. Leakey cooked food enough to last several days and packed it in a pillow case. Mr. Leakey strapped it across his neck and shoulders, but not a morsel of it was ever eaten by any member of that party. The grim bravery of the men was matched by that of the women, as they bade them goodby.

The plan was to follow the Indians on foot until they were found some night in camp, then the attack would be made. Their trail led in a southwesterly direction toward a high range of mountains about two miles away. The settlers later learned that there were about twenty-five of the Indians ambushed on top of the mountain awaiting the approach of the white men, whom they could see, following their trail in the valley below. They had deliberately laid a trap for the white men. In order to be sure the unsuspecting men would not lose the trail, the Indians cut down bushes occasionally with their tomahawks, so they could be easily followed. It was a tedious and an exhausting ascent. There were steep ledges, slanting rocks, huge boulders, scrubby cedars, and tangled vines to surmount and tear through. When the party finally arrived at the crest of the mountain, they were hot, tired and windbroken and not in condition for a battle. Henry Robinson, an old trailer, was in front when they reached the ambush on top of the mountain. Just before reaching the top, Mr. Thompson, always on the lookout for signs, said he believed the Indians were on top of the mountain because he saw buzzards, as he shifted his large Spanish gourd full of water which was strapped to his left arm.

"Oh, there is not an Indian in ten miles of here," declared Mr. Leakey who was next to Mr. Robinson.

Just then Mr. Robinson and Mr. Leakey stopped to rest. The others had not quite reached the top of the mountain when two shots were fired at them by the Indians. At the same time, Mr. Thompson, probably the third man from the top, saw an Indian running along the ledge in plain view waving a red blanket and yelling. He was trying to draw the fire of the men in the rear to him so that the men in front would fall an easier victim. The Indians now broke cover in several places. Mr. Robinson saw at a glance they were in a trap and were confronted with a superior force. Quickly aiming his rifle, he fired and wheeled back, telling Mr. Leakey to do the same. Mr. Leakey, however, had sprung forward and was vainly trying to fire his gun at the jumping and yelling painted savages, who in a few minutes were all around him shooting arrows. The other three men were a few yards in the rear. All leveled their guns and fired. They called to Mr. Leakey to run and then went back themselves.

The gun Mr. Leakey had was a new double-triggered gun, borrowed from John Richards, and one he had never fired. He had been used to a single-trigger gun. Having failed to spring the trigger, he could not pull the hammer down. He had the muzzle almost at the Indian's breast and jerked at the trigger hard enough, it seemed to break it out. Realizing it was useless, he threw the gun down and pulled his pistol and shot one Indian just as he was aiming at Mr. Robinson. He now began to get his work in on the Indians and backed away, keeping them at bay, although repeatedly wounded himself. He could not go back the way he came because the Indians were between him and his companions and were forcing him toward a steep and rugged cliff. His pistol finally refused to fire. Thinking he had exhausted his loads, he now for the first time turned his back on the Indians and plunged over the cliff—rolling and tumbling—catching here and there at the bushes and rocks for a hundred feet or more. He finally landed astride a tall,

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slender cedar sapling, which bent with his weight. He rode this down over a ledge and found a stopping place. Nearly dead with wounds and exhaustion, he lay down under a wild cherry tree.

Presently he heard the Indians above him, evidently looking to see if they could discover him lodged anywhere. He examined his pistol and to his surprise found one chamber loaded. An arrow had struck between the cylinder and barrel. The small point of the spike had broken off and was tightly fixed so that the cylinder could not revolve to the next load. Mr. Leakey had snapped several times after the pistol failed to fire, not noticing, in the terrific combat, that the cylinder did not revolve when he drew the hammer back and that it fell in an empty chamber each time he attempted to shoot. Two of the Indians thinking that Mr. Leakey was dead, started down an easier descent, evidently expecting to scalp him. Getting to his feet he charged them, presenting his pistol. The Indians, realizing that he was not dead, probably thought he had had time to reload. Having observed and experienced a few minutes before the efficiency with which he could handle a six shooter, they beat a hasty retreat, Mr. Leakey cursed them as they fell back. Those curses were joyous sounds to his companions, because they knew for the first time that he was not dead.

Wounded Taken Home.

When Mr. Leakey had gotten clear of the Indians, one of them had picked up the double-triggered rifle which Mr. Leakey had thrown down. The Indian understood how to use it. Stepping out on the cliff where he could see Webster, Barrymore, and Robinson, who had stopped under cover, he thought to reload his rifle, Thompson was just back of him. The Indian shot at him. The ball passed just above his right ear, passed on to Mr. Barrymore, wounding him in the right hip. They were soon joined by Mr. Robinson, who wanted to shoot the Indian, who was still in plain view.

"No, Henry, don't shoot," said Gid Thompson, "It will bring all of them on us again, and we have no loaded guns."

Those in the party who were not wounded went to Mr. Robinson and then to Mr. Leakey and gave them water from Gid Thompson's gourd. The water soon revived Mr. Leakey, and he began to talk.

"Damn the gun! I could not make it shoot!" were his first words. "I must have broken it in some way—I pulled and pulled on that trigger."

He was hit by arrows in nine places. One arrow had struck near the wrist as he had his arm extended toward the Indians, and it penetrated lengthwise of the arm nearly to the shoulder, and was still transfixed. Other wounds were in the neck, face, head, thigh, and body.

The battle was over and they all went down the mountain, Barrymore having to be supported. Mr. Leakey still had his provisions strapped to his shoulders. They were saturated with blood, and had to be thrown away. After arriving at the Anglin ranch again, Dud Richardson was sent to the Patterson settlement for re-enforcements. An expedition was organized and went in pursuit of the Indians. They were finally overtaken and massacred on the Leona River. Mr. Leakey was taken home to a grateful family. It took about six weeks for him to recover from the wounds received during this battle. He had many other encounters with the Indians, too numerous to record here.

"How many wounds do you have on your body?" asked Mr. Sowell, author of "The Indian Fighters," from which these data were checked.

"I don't know. You will have to strip me and see," laughed Mr. Leakey.

Years later when the Indians were being colonized, two Indians were being held in jail at San Antonio. They would not talk. Tom Leakey went to see them. One of the Indians laughed when he saw him, and tried to get his hands through the bars to shake hands with him. He told Tom where he lived and how many were in his family.

"Many times I could have reached out and killed you. But you were not bothering me," said the Indian. "I don't know your name, but I know all about you. One time I was on one side of the mountain, and your sisters were playing on the other side. Your mother saw us and sent your brother to tell them to come home quick, the Indians were near. But they were not bothering us, so we did not bother them."

Mr. Leakey believed that when the Indians killed anyone there was a white man with them; otherwise they only plundered or stole from the settlers.

As the family grew a larger house was built of logs. It contained two rooms across the front with a hall between and a long shed room across the back. Later they built a large house of cypress lumber sawed at the mill. The kitchen and dining room were in the yard just back of the main house. The carriage house and smokehouse was attached to the back of them.

Cypress shingles were made by hand until they could put in a wooden water wheel which furnished power to operate the shingle saws. The mill was later moved to Spring Branch on the Leakey homestead. After the war N. M. C. Patterson, an uncle of Mrs. Leakey, and Mr. Leakey established a steam saw mill. Later Mr. Leakey bought the Patterson interest and became the sole owner.

Shingles and lumber were hauled to San Antonio in wagons which brought back flour, coffee, sugar and other necessities. These supplies at first were kept in the Leakey home and sold to the settlers. Later a store was established.

When the Civil War broke out, Mr. Leakey left his family with his father-in-law and enlisted in the Confederate Army. He used his teams for hauling provisions for the Confederacy including guano secured in a bat cave near Con Can which was used in making gun powder. He also hauled cotton to Point Isabel and frequently brought back salt.

Began to Acquire Land.

After the war closed, the Leakeys returned to their home on the Frio. Mr. Leakey continued to manage the saw mill and to give more attention to increasing his herds of cattle, sheep, and goats. He had secured some land by pre-emption when he first came to the canyon. Later he bought large tracks of land, frequently from settlers who were dissatisfied. At one time he owned several hundred acres of land on the East and on the West prongs of the Frio.

Mr. and Mrs. Leakey were interested in the children having the best educational opportunities possible at that time. Before a free school could be established he built a school house and employed teachers to instruct his children and the other children in the community.

The first building was used for both school and for church services and was located about one and one-half miles below the present town of Leakey. It was a long building with a fireplace. The men in the community donated their work. The Leakey children rode to school on horseback unless it was very cold, then they preferred to walk. Among those early-day teachers was the late Judge Bob Burney of Kerrville.

Mr. and Mrs. Leakey were careful to see that their children received religious training. The preacher was always a welcome guest. During the early days services were conducted by circuit rider preachers. The children remembers a Reverend Horton among the first. He arrived unexpectedly for the first meal.

Local Paper Features Association Employee

MISS FLORENCE COLSTON

In the afternoon Fort Worth Star-Telegram of October 3, Katherine Howard had a feature article on Miss Florence Colston and her many years of employment by the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, Inc., as head of its brand department. "Cattle brands are her business," states Mrs. Howard. "For 43 years they've been her business and they were her father's business before her." The late J. W. Colston "broke" his daughter into this work in 1895.

The account carries details on how the brands are taken from renditions turned in by members, each member's brands listed on a card in the style of the membership, then assembled in numerical or character order in brand books and sent out to the inspectors in Texas and other states.

Miss Colston has been honored in women's club circles in Fort Worth. She is a charter member of the Business and Professional Women's Club, and was its president in 1931-32. She was also a charter member of the local Y. W. C. A. and for many years taught the Colston Sunday School Class of the First Methodist Church. She is at present a member of the city's Library Board.

Miss Colston was born in Kentucky, but came to Texas with her parents when a baby. The family settled in Young county, the birthplace of the Association. She was teaching a small country school before entering the employ of the Association.

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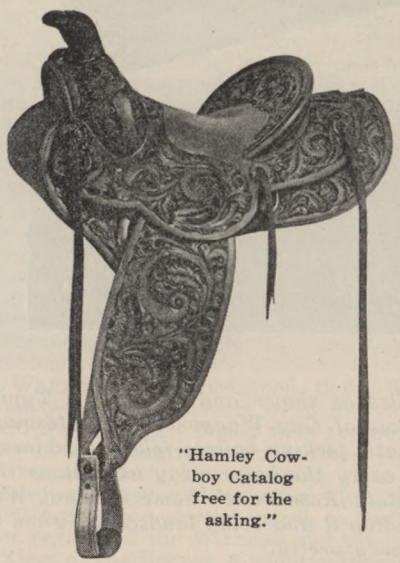
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Mrs. Leakey was embarrassed and apologized for her lack of preparation.

"Sister Leakey, I can eat your food better than your apologies," was his smiling rejoinder.

The town of Leakey was laid out in 1883 and was cut off the old Leakey homestead. Mr. Leakey donated the square for the courthouse, lots for a school and a church and located two Baptist ministers in the town. The post-office was moved there from Flora. The town was named for Mr. Leakey and became the county seat of Edwards county. Later the county seat was moved to Rock Springs and Leakey later became the county seat of Real county when it was organized in 1913. The pleasures of the Leakey family equalled the hardships. Even in the early days when they were continuously watching for the Indians, the children had lots of fun.

One of their early sports was to steal rides on the logs that were being hauled to be cut into lumber. They were fastened together with chains, and taken to the mill by oxen. This, however, was a forbidden sport because the logs were likely to slip and crush the rider. Another sport was to ride the wheel of the mill. This was accomplished by one child stepping between the spokes of the wheel and holding tightly as the wheel went round and round. Several children would ride at a time. In later years after the Indians stopped raiding the children swam in the river and often gathered wild flowers.

"One of my greatest joys was to listen to the birds on the branch," declares Mrs. Augusta Leakey Austin.

The younger children did not suffer the fear of the Indians. They enjoyed the freedom of the country.

Other recreations included fish frys, dances, and barbecues. Everyone knew everybody else and called each other by his first name.

The citizens of the canyon and divide expressed their appreciation for Mr. and Mrs. Leakey at a barbecue on Mr. Leakey's seventy-sixth birthday by presenting him with a sterling silver pitcher and Mrs. Leakey with a silver goblet to match. Each was engraved with an appropriate inscription and both pieces are still treasures of two members of the Leakey family.

Their home was noted for its hospitality. Everybody was welcome.

"Get down! Come in! Here take this horse and feed it!" was Mr. Leakey's greeting. Sometimes the company proved to be undesirable.

All the children were taught to work.

"Mother taught us to work in such a way that we got a real thrill out of it," said Mrs. Ella Leakey Youngblood, the youngest daughter. "She was a great companion to her children. She did not make us work. She worked with us."

Mr. Leakey died in 1900; Mrs. Leakey sixteen years later at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Ella Leakey Youngblood.

The Leakey children were Mack Leakey, married Sarah Holcomb, is dead; Tom Leakey, is dead; Fannie, married J. B. Johnson, is dead; George Leakey, dead; Mattie, married G. A. Tutwiler is dead; Mary, married V. D. Miles, lives in Uvalde; Augusta married S. B. Austin, lives in Uvalde, and Ella, married T. A. Youngblood, generally known as "Jack," lives in Leakey.

John Leakey is the only grandchild bearing the Leakey name. He is a prominent cattleman in North Dakota and is the oldest son of Mack Leakey.

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